

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1 - 5. (Cancelled)

6. (Currently amended) A method for producing a nonwoven fabric by bonding fibers to each other, comprising the steps of:

supplying raw material of said fibers to a first centrifugal separator;

ejecting fibers from said first centrifugal separator by a centrifugal force;

and

supplying a hygroscopic agent onto said fibers ejected from said first centrifugal separator so that said hygroscopic agent adheres to at least part of said fibers, wherein the hygroscopic agent comprises ~~particles of silicon dioxide~~ a substance having calcium oxide and porous particles of silicon dioxide adhering to the periphery of said substance.

7. (Original) A method for producing a nonwoven fabric according to claim 6, wherein a second centrifugal separator is disposed on a lateral side of said first centrifugal separator and wherein a belt mechanism including a belt driven to circulate is disposed below said first and second centrifugal separators, said method further comprising the steps of:

forming, on said belt, a first layer of said fibers ejected from said first centrifugal separator, said hygroscopic agent adhering to at least part of said fibers; and
ejecting fibers from said second centrifugal separator by a centrifugal force to form a second layer made only of the fibers on said first layer.

8. (Currently amended) A method for producing a nonwoven fabric by bonding fibers to each other, comprising the steps of:

- (a) supplying raw material of fibers to a centrifugal separator;
- (b) ejecting fibers from said centrifugal separator by a centrifugal force and forming a fiber layer by bonding said ejected fibers to each other; and
- (c) adhering a hygroscopic agent to said fiber layer, wherein the hygroscopic agent comprises ~~particles of silicon dioxide~~ a substance having calcium oxide and porous particles of silicon dioxide adhering to the periphery of said substance.

9. (Original) A method for producing a nonwoven fabric according to claim 8, wherein said step (c) includes the steps of:
heating said fiber layer; and
supplying said hygroscopic agent onto said heated fiber layer.

10. (Original) A method for producing a nonwoven fabric according to claim 8, further comprising a step of:

(d) covering the entirety of said fiber layer to which said hygroscopic agent adheres with an air-permeable sheet.

11. (Original) A method for producing a nonwoven fabric according to claim 10, wherein said step (d) includes the steps of:

supplying said air-permeable sheet above and below said fiber layer to which said hygroscopic agent adheres; and

cutting said fiber layer to which said hygroscopic agent adheres to a desired number of pieces having a desired size and simultaneously therewith, covering each of said pieces with said air-permeable sheet.

12-17. (Cancelled)